DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 024 678 TE 000 893

By- O'Malley, William J.

How To Teach "Dirty" Books in High School.

Pub Date Nov 67

Note- 7p.

Available from- Media and Methods Institute, Inc., 134 N. 13th St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19107 (Single copy $0.50).

Journal Cit- Educators Guide to Media and Methods; v4 n3 p6-11,46 Nov 1967

EDRS Price MF-$0.25 HC Not Available from EDRS.

Descriptors- Censorship, Cultural Enrichment, *English Instruction, Literary Discrimination, *Literature, Literature Appreciation, Moral Issues, *Moral Values, Novels, Reading Materials, *Reading Material Selection, School Community Relationship, *Secondary Education, Teaching Methods, Twentieth Century Literature

Today's self-centered, utopian attitudes toward sexual experience compel teachers to avoid both overcaution and over-indulgence in selecting controversial books for classroom use. One method of selection is to rank books in a gradual progression from those requiring little literary and sexual sophistication in the reader to those requiring much sophistication. If books are selected according to this progression, a student's first encounter with love in books will be love without physical description. He will later be prepared for physical description of love placed in easily recognizable moral contexts. In teaching controversial books, the teacher must avoid glossing over "shocking" passages in class; arrange for student counselors and the principal to read the books and, perhaps, listen to discussions; write to parents explaining what is being taught and why; stress to the students that a significant novel says something about man's life; and, most importantly, train the students to maintain an aesthetic distance which is a necessary part of literary discrimination. (JS)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
OFFICE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL OFFICE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY.

ED 024 078

EDUCATORS GUIDE TO media AND METHODS

November 1967 Vol. 4, No. 3

ADVISORY BOARD

Barry K. Beyer
Ass't Prof. of Education
The Ohio State University

Max Bogart
Ass't Dir., Div. of Curriculum & Instruc.
State Dept. of Educ., Trenton, N. J.

Charlotte Brooks
Supervising Dir. of English
Wash., D. C. Public Schools

John Culkin, S.J.
Director, Center for Communications
Fordham University, New York City

Daniel Fader
Project Dir., Dept. of English
U. of Michigan at Ann Arbor

Sidney Forman
Prof. of Education and Librarian
Teachers College, Columbia U., N. Y.

Morris Gall
Social Studies Dept. Head
Norwalk Public Schools, Conn.

Donald Klemer
Superintendent of Schools
Hastings-on-Hudson, N. Y.

Peter Kontos
Asst. Director, Soc. Sci. Program
Greater Cleveland

Philip Lewis
President, Instructional
Dynamics, Inc., Chicago, Illinois

Marshall McLuhan
Albert Schweitzer Prof. of Humanities
Fordham University, New York City

Joseph Mersand
Chm. of English Dept.
Jamaica HS, New York City

William B. Sanborn
Dir., Div. Instructional Materials
San Francisco Unified Schools, Cal.

Bertram Siegel
Chm. of Science Dept.
Bedford Jr. HS, Westport, Conn.

M. Jerry Weiss
Chm., English Dept.
Jersey State College, N. J.

STAFF

Editor, Frank McLaughlin
Monmouth College, N. J.
Motion Pictures, John Culkin, S.J.
Fordham University
Television, Ned Hoopes
Pace College, N. Y. C.
Records & Tapes, Kirby Judd
Long Meadow HS, Mass.
Paperbacks, Frank Ross
Eastern Michigan University
Associate Editor, John Rouse
Smithtown, N. Y. Public Schools
Communications, David Sohn
Fordham University
Managing Editor, Charles Faucher
Art Director, Peter Renich
Production Dir., R. KennethBaxter
Subscription Manager, Mary Claffey
Marketing Director, Bryce Smith
Publisher, Roger Damio

TE 000 893

4 Feedback

6 How to Teach Dirty Books in High School
by William O'Malley, S.J. Is "suggestive" literature unteachable smut or a teaching must? .....*TEACHING*

12 The Death of Willie Baxter
by John Rouse Teenagers today differ in more than quantity from their predecessors .....*TEACHING*

18 New Circuits or Short Circuits?
by Frank McLaughlin Probes into the English curriculum and an introduction to a new teaching concept .....*TEACHING*

22 Saint Joan
by Stanford Summers Hallmark presents St. Joan on TV the 4th of December. Get your students ready .....*TELEVISION*

28 Up the Staircase, and . . .
by Richard Tyre, who liked the movie .....*FILM*

30 Down the Staircase
by David Sohn, who didn't like the movie at all .....*FILM*

33 The Monkees
by Ned Hoopes An experiment which uses a TV program as the topic for a composition assignment .....*TELEVISION*

37 Telelog

38 Recommended Shorts: The New Film Biographies
by William J. Sloan Biography on film just ain't what it used to be *FILM*

41 Editors Bookshelf: American Studies and World History
by Morris Gall Selections that kids will read .....*PAPERBACKS*

42 Earsights: A Column of Sound Observations
by Tony Schwartz The quality of sound in education .....*TAPES*

44 Have You Discovered?.....*PAPERBACKS*

47 Paperback Briefcase
by Frank Ross The newest in paperbacks .....*PAPERBACKS*

COVER Bowdlerized page from Joseph Heller's modern classic, *Catch 22.* Is this any way to teach a book? See page 6.

Educators Guide to MEDIA AND METHODS (formerly SCHOOL PAPERBACK JOURNAL) is published nine times per year September through May by Media and Methods Institute, Inc. General offices: 134 N. 13th St., Philadelphia, Pa. 19107. Phone: (215) 564-5170. Executive and Advertising offices: 405 Lexington Ave., N.Y.C. 10017. Phone: (212) 687-8458. Subscription: $3.00 per year, $4.00 in Canada. $2.00 each for 20 or more to one school address. Single copy 40¢. © Copyright, Media and Methods Institute, Inc., 1967. Printed in U.S.A. by World Color Press. Controlled circulation postage paid at Sparta, Illinois.

How To Teach "Dirty" Books In High School

by William J. O'Malley, S.J.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL BY MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY Media and Methods, and author TO ERIC AND ORGANIZATIONS OPERATING UNDER AGREEMENTS WITH THE U. S. OFFICE OF EDUCATION. FURTHER REPRODUCTION OUTSIDE THE ERIC SYSTEM REQUIRES PERMISSION OF THE COPYRIGHT OWNER."

EVERYBODY gets a bit afraid when a cleric starts talking about dirty books. There's always the chance that he'll start breathing fire like Savanarola and telling you that it's only a mere sample of what you'll get down in the Great Bonfire if you sully your minds with smutty literature. One evening at an NCTE convention a few years ago, the conversation swung inevitably around to "the right to read," and another English teacher said to me, "Well, your job is to keep them from sin; my job is to make human beings out of them." And I said, "What's the difference?"

The Biblical Greek word for sin is *hamartia,* which originally comes from a term in archery meaning "to miss the point." When you come right down to it, then, we need not even mention the word "sin." Whether teachers are religiously-oriented or not, they're all trying to prevent the same thing: missing the whole point of human life. So I intend to speak here not of hell-fire and brimstone but about persons—who were born to create themselves more fully by growing, who can quite likely be *helped* to miss the point, who can give the ignorant "yes" or the pseudo-sophisticated "no" to

the whole point of sex in human life.

Before we get down to the main focus of this article, I would like to pull back a moment from the tight shot we always take of the reading problem: the hatchet-faced Puritan nose-to-nose with the lank-haired Beatnik. I'd like first to take a long shot of the whole teenage picture today in order to put this particular problem in more meaningful perspective.

The teenage *angst* is far wider than the problem of teenage reading or films. It is a problem of the whole teenage way of looking at things (or ignoring them), the whole teenage "philosophy of life." Many teachers and parents don't seem to realize, even now, that something started happening to children when Mommy propped them up on the living room rug in front of the cheapest of babysitters: the TV. While she was dusting and washing and getting dinner, a stranger was talking to the kiddies—talking, talking—telling them all sorts of nice and nasty things. And the ads were there, too, whispering the message at the core of all ads: "you *need* this in order to be loved. Be loved! Take care of Old Number One! Be free! Be blonde! Be Pepsi-Generation! You have your right to happiness—it's almost free, easy, no money down, years to pay." And the *Kinder* watched, and they listened, and they believed, with the result that the Pepto-Generation isn't really sure what the Pepsi-Generation believes in or wants or even cares about. But it seems they're out for an innocently genial self-centered life.

Bond offers a good focal point. So does *Boys and Girls Together*. Their enthusiastic and uncritical acceptance by old and young alike shows that, to many thousands of people, the only arena of significant human experience is the rack—either the kind in the torture chamber or the kind in the bedroom. As Grandma says to the sexy Adonis in Albee's play. *"You're* the American Dream!" And he tells us what that is: "All I am is what you see—my face, my body, I let them use my body." With an existential situation like this, where everything is bodies and surfaces, where ads are a Never-Never Land of undress and innuendo, where the mass media rarely graze the surface or even the underside of reality, just *try* to lead kids to agonize with Hamlet or Stephen Kumalo —or with their own parents, or with the girls they use for pleasure units on Saturday night. Some kids respond well to movies like *The Pawnbroker,* but there are many who say, "It woulda been a helluva good movie if they didn't keep interrupting with all that junk about the old Jew in the concentration camp."

My problem with this situation is not that it results in sins, but that it results in frustration, and that's why it *is* a sin.

First, it makes kids inhuman. It winds them tighter and tighter around themselves. It keeps them locked in a child's hall of mirrors where the only password is "Me first!" When they come to it, copulation (as opposed to sex) is the only basis of marriage. In too many minds, when copulation fails, so does the marriage, and life. On the other hand, sacrifice-for-one-another is as unthinkably square as *Little Women.*

How do we show these kids the difference between sex which is the gift of selves between persons, and sex which is autoeroticism with an assistant? If they fail to find the difference, life will be a frustration.

Second, these Utopian sex-and-violence experiences result in the core of the teenager's creed: Perfection Now! They're not going to find it, inside themselves or outside. But they have been programed to demand it from anything they expend time, effort, or money for. We've made them crave it, and the craving, denied, leads to pessimism (where everybody is "a self-defrosting bastard" till he proves otherwise) and to the either/or value-judgments (good = easy; bad = everything else).

So they look to sex for that monumental (if momentary) escape to Perfection Now. It's going to be "them colored lights," the earth moving, the bells and banjos. But actually, in the beginning, it's only two kids scared and sick and afraid to run away, and later two zombies trying to alchemize love from self-centeredness, trying to find the short-cut, the magic word, the way to have

---

Rev. O'Malley teaches English at McQuaid Jesuit High School, Rochester, N.Y.

"How do we show kids the difference between sex which is the gift of selves between persons, and sex which is auto-eroticism with an assistant?"

the thrill of love without the gift of self-forgetfulness. This is not Tom Playfair and Elsie Dinsmore paging through *Playboy* and *Fanny Hill*. This is Holden Caulfield, an intensely knowledgeable, sensitive, and confused boy or girl.

Now, what to do about "dirty" books in this situation? Down in the narrow, tight shot we see two extreme solutions—one the overcautious, the other the over-indulgent.

The cautious teacher thinks the hypersensitive teenager should know the clinical facts about sex, but one must always remember that the main purpose of a novel is to *involve* the reader in the experience portrayed. Therefore, once sex comes in, the adolescent is incapable of judging a particularly stimulating scene even in the context of a highly moral book.

Consequently there is more than a little danger in these hodge-podge lists which are handed out to all students. One, for instance, has Pasternak just before Poe, Koestler just after Kipling, *Of Mice and Men* just before *Dracula*. Until he was "discovered," one teacher was giving all seniors an unbroken diet of Albee, Williams, Camus, Nietzche and (gasp!) *Giovanni's Room!* These people have something to say to today's kids, something that frequently "grabs" them, but I submit that, although we cannot shield them from darkness, it is our job to illuminate it a bit.

Finally, parents do have rights, in justice, regarding the education of their children. Even though parents are ill-formed, they *do* have authority. So, let's give the kids classics and antiseptic stuff and maybe sneak *Catcher* to the more mature, with a caution to "talk it over with me, and don't tell anybody else about it."

On the other side, the indulgent teacher wonders whether it is better to read a flagrant book alone or to read something less dangerous under direction and with the opportunity of discussing it. The "innocence" of our youth is already being deftly filched away by the mass media, and who says that the secure ignorance engendered by the hard-cover anthology is preferable to the risk involved in growth? Furthermore, how do you give *The Ingenue of the Sierras* to a boy who has witnessed Ursula Andress undress last Saturday night? And why don't Mumsie and Dadsie object to *Twelfth Night* or *The Canterbury Tales* or, God help us, the *Old Testament?* At what age and by what means will they finally be able to open an unbowdlerized classic? Does sexual self-possession click on like a thermostat on one's wedding day?

Therefore, the indulgent have one rule: nothing *too* descriptive.

IN SUMMARY: one leans toward, "Touch pitch and be defiled," and the other toward, "Sink or swim." Both are right, and both are wrong.

Somehow we have to steer a course between the two products each camp accuses the other of producing: the Babe *in* the woods type and the Babe *into* the woods type. We have to prepare adolescents for realistic reading, and realistic life.

As one way of doing this, I would like to suggest the GRAPH (at article's end), THREE GENERAL PRINCIPLES, A SKETCH OF A POSSIBLE PROGRAM and, finally, SOME CAUTIONS.

The GRAPH ranges books according to two coordinate factors: (1) the sexual sophistication required in the reader, going from Little Goody Two-Shoes at the top to the Marquis de Sade at the bottom, and (2) the literary sophistication required in the reader, going from scarcely literate at the left to highly skilled at the right. The graph is one

man's opinion and the lines are not inflexible. Like all schemes it has the danger of locking people and authors into square boxes.

Otherwise, it is more or less self-explanatory. Its purpose is merely to situate a class of teenagers where they are and to move them gradually south-south-east. One grave mistake frequently made by young teachers is to strand students out in the desert of *Another Country* before they've seen what real love looks like, or dump them into stream-of-consciousness techniques before they are conscious of any technique.

The THREE PRINCIPLES: first, the books we give out should be neither too literarily sophisticated nor so sexually unrealistic that anyone who has seen *Batman* will know they are a joke, kid stuff. Second, an adolescent's initial contact with love in books should be normal love, with no physical descriptions. Third, the first contact with sexual description should occur only after a great deal of preparation and then only with situations which mostly suggest vaguely and are placed in an easily recognizable moral context.

The PROGRAM: First, teenagers must know what a novel attempts to do. Both the over-cautious and the over-indulgent are so busy building or storming barricades that they become more concerned with sex than with the novel, more concerned with getting the upper hand than with kids. We must wean students away from the idea that a novel is judged merely on its ability to entertain, and make them see that a significant novel (or film) tries to say something bigger, something about man's life.

The second step is training the teenage reader to maintain *aesthetic distance*. By that I mean the reader's ability to be aware that he is being led by the hand through a new life by a stranger, while simultaneously able to enjoy the experience. Paradoxically, I think, this is what instinctively riles parents about "dirty" books. They don't want their children to hang around with shady strangers. What the TV says seems trivial and therefore harmless, but many parents have the semi-literate's respectful fear of the book. When the book has something "adult" about it, they balk.

Achieving this aesthetic distance may seem impossible to the reader who has never reflected how frequently but unconsciously he has done it himself. This distance we are seeking is not aloofness. The very definition of literary experience demands an involvement. But it need not be the involvement of substitution, in which the reader actually assumes the very role of the character with all its actions, attitudes, concessions, views of life. It is rather the sympathy of the good friend to whom the character is unburdening himself. The friend aches with him, "understands" the crushing forces within and without, which make the "sin" almost inevitable. But he need not necessarily approve the objective act or, even worse, imitate it or sacrifice his own sense of values to the character's.

Because of his high-powered imagination, the teenager gets shackled into the story, and the writer can make him believe and re-live anything he cares to put on paper. The child *becomes* Blanche du Bois or Stanley Kowalski. But, like these characters, he is unable to see himself or his fictional *alter ego* in any context wider than the immediate one. He can overgeneralize, from *Irma La Douce* or *Gone with the Wind*, that all prostitutes are carefree, peaches-and-cream gals. He arrives at what Edmund Fuller calls "the whorehouse mystique." With his very minimal, inchoate "philosophy of life" and his limited, usually sheltered experience, he is unable to

balance Irma and Belle Watling with Sadie Thompson, Grushenka, or with the pitifully real girl, to form a comprehensive, undramatic, adult notion of the life of the prostitute. To many, this kind of woman remains part freak, part changeling, part joke, rather than a human being in torment. To others, she is a disgusting degenerate, beneath contempt, and for the rest of their lives they'll turn their Pharasaic faces away from her lest their righteousness be lessened by her pain.

And yet the teenager is not going to understand the prostitute either by being thrust into a room with her (actually or vicariously) or by hearing her existence denied. The important thing is not knowing the facts about her or having the experience with her but feeling the compassion for her. Experience without reflection is not educative. It is merely one damn thing after another.

The key to teaching controversial books is, I think, precisely here: keeping enough objectivity about a story to know that I am not actually going through it myself, to know that I am reading this story as much for

LITERARY SOPHISTICATION DEMANDED OF READER

AMOUNT AND KIND OF SEX

	No reading background	Little background	Moderate background	Increasingly larger background
"No" love	High School anthologies, *Tom Swift*, etc.	H. MacInnes A. MacLean	*Lord of the Rings, Separate Peace*	*Member of the Wedding, Moby Dick, Huck Finn, Lord of the Flies*
Pure love		Tarzan	*Marty, Mr. Chips, Waterfront, Anne Frank, Intruder in the Dust*	*Jane Eyre, Pride and Prejudice, David Copperfield*
Sex implied	*True Confessions, et. al.*		*Mockingbird, Rain, Rebecca, Mrs. Mike, Ethan Frome, Cry, The Beloved Country, Catcher in the Rye, West Side Story*	*Vanity Fair, Skin of Our Teeth, Anna Karenina, Scarlet Letter, Flannery O'Connor*
Briefly described		Costain, Shellabarger, Van Wyck Mason, et. al.	*All Quiet on the Western Front, Good Earth, Cypresses Believe in God, Go Tell It on the Mountain, Black Like Me*	*Old Testament,* Shakespeare, *Tom Jones*
Described, clear context			*Too Late the Phalarope, Caine Mutiny,* Graham Greene, *Grapes of Wrath*	*Kristin Lavaransdatter,* Chaucer
Moral context unclear	*Life, Look*	*Time*	*Of Mice and Men, 1984, Rabbit Run,* Nabakov, Mary Renault	*Ulysses,* T. Williams, *Sanctuary*
Without (?) moral context	*Candy, Fanny Hill,* G. Metalious, Yerby, *Playboy*	J. McDonald, I. Fleming, E. Caldwell	*Another Country, Giovanni's Room, Boys and Girls Together,* T. Capote, N. Mailer	*Lady Chatterley,* E. Albee

Comments:

(1) Each teacher has to make his or her own graph

(2) The graph should be made, or added to, as soon after reading as possible.

(3) Scenes which don't "bother" us, frequently cause trouble for adolescents.

their sake as for my own, to know that the old Jewish pawnbroker is more important than the prostitute's attempt to seduce him.

Start them off in first-year high school with the Bounty mutineers, Kino, and Shane, people they can readily begin to understand and care for. Get them gradually aware of the techniques involved in fleshing out a literary character for oneself (first column of the graph). Then in second year, help them learn how to find an author's purpose through his choice of details, his diction, his point of view. What does he want you to think about these people and their actions? How do you know? By third year, they should be ready to prepare for the place of sex in literature.

Many teachers give *Rebecca* to all comers and yet, strangely, no one has ever accused them of justifying murder. In many cases, they themselves don't realize that they have been lured by a finely-told tale into condoning Rebecca's murder, lured by technique: the first-person narrator who loves the murderer. Once students have suddenly realized they have been taken in, they may tend to be at least a little more wary of the next book. *Rain* and *Champion* lets them see how an author's opinion of his characters can be subtly passed on to the reader, and they let students see that neither prudery nor self-centeredness is the human approach to sex. Both "miss the point."

At this juncture the literary and moral have met in stories that are certainly realistic, that show sex as a part not only of the biology class and the locker-room seminar, but of human life, and without provocative details. If a high school junior is not ready at this point to move upward through *The Good Earth* and *Catcher in the Rye,* I doubt any teacher can ever make him ready.

But what about the boy or girl who finds even descriptions of kissing to be "incentives to evil"? These students have the duty to prepare themselves for *this* life, and they can't change that vocation the way an oversensitive medical student can change to accounting. If the problem becomes known, help them. If this does not work, perhaps

(Continued on page 46)

"DIRTY" BOOKS

(Continued from page 11)

they need some kind of professional help. But our assignments should be governed by the needs and abilities of the *normal* adolescent—neither overly sheltered nor overly experienced.

As long as their exposure is gradual, aiming more at compassion for persons than at knowledge of sexual variations, and governed by that elusive virtue, prudence, high school seniors should be able to read more and more sexually and literarily sophisticated novels and be prepared to look into the lives of other human persons—to care rather than to snoop.

A couple of CAUTIONS: (1) Respect the individual yourself, whether it is a parent or a student. If a situation demands adaptations, adapt, or you will end up as bad as the opposition—intransigent, caring more for unexamined convictions than for the people they affect. (2) Take the offensive, referring in class directly to the "shocking" passages and forcing discussion of them. Don't be a Liberal in assignments and a Puritan in discussions. Kids never bring problems to someone who can be shocked, nor do they ordinarily bring them to someone who sounds toughened. (3) Arrange that the student counsellor and the principal read the books and even sit in on discussions. (4) Write a letter to the parents explaining what you are doing and, more important, why. It will clarify a lot of your own ideas and plans, and potential criticism always engenders prudence.

We hear a lot about "films for adults only" or "books for the discriminating adult," as if adulthood were conferred with a draft card or a senior driver's license. Discrimination demands the ability to stand back, to preserve aesthetic distance while still caring about the person involved, to make a judgment without condemning, to love the sinner without loving the sin. I keep wondering how the over-cautious or the over-indulgent teachers and parents and administrators *became* discriminating adults themselves. Or did they? Have they themselves, perhaps, "missed the point"?